

WASHINGTON, DC--Next week, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) will offer an amendment to the Interior Appropriations bill to protect wildlife on the Klamath National Wildlife Refuges. Currently, the two Klamath Refuges (Lower Klamath and Tule) are the only Wildlife Refuges in the country where farming for purely commercial purposes is still allowed.

This amendment would affect the sixteen agricultural leases that expire in October 2002--covering approximately 2000 acres of the 22,000 acres on these refuges that are currently leased for commercial agriculture. New leases on the refuges would not be permitted to grow alfalfa or row crops (such as onions, potatoes or sugar beets). These crops use large amounts of irrigation water, involve intensive use of pesticides, and provide no food or other benefits to wildlife. Under the amendment, other less intensive crops would be permitted, and the refuges would be able to continue the practice of "co-operative farming," under which a portion of the crop is left in the fields for wildlife.

"My amendment is a simple, reasonable, and vital step toward putting the Klamath basin back in balance," said Congressman Blumenauer.

No other wetland area in the western continental United States provides more feeding, resting and nesting habitat than the marshes and lakes of the Lower Klamath and Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuges. President Theodore Roosevelt established one of the nation's first wildlife refuges there in 1908. Every year, millions of birds come to the Klamath marshes in search of food and cover and the Klamath Basin is often referred to as the "western Everglades."

The two Klamath Refuges are unique in another way: farming for purely commercial purposes is still allowed. None of the other National Wildlife Refuges permits commercial agriculture operations leasing refuge land to use toxic pesticides and grow crops that have no benefit to the wildlife that use the refuge.

This amendment takes the first steps to restore the ecological health of the National Wildlife Refuges in the upper Klamath Basin.